

Grigory Gendler And His Brother-Officers



This photograph was taken near Moscow in 1942.
You can see me and my brother-officers at the front line.

In the beginning of December the Western front under the command of Zhukov (including our brigade) began counterattack. We liberated Istra and moved towards Volokolamsk.

On December 19, 1941 our brigade entered Volokolamsk by force, having made good execution to Germans. After the recapture of Volokolamsk we spent a quiet night in the basement of the local school.

There we found a gramophone record with Klavdiya Shulzhenko's song Zapiska (Note). We listened to it times without number.

In the central square of the city we found 8 local Komsomol members hanged by fascists. Two years later during the Kursk campaign there happened the following episode: actors arrived, and among them there was Klavdiya Shulzhenko [a popular Soviet singer]. It was a great concert for the whole tank army.

During the concert I sent to Klavdiya Shulzhenko a note with the request to sing a song Note. I also described in short that unforgettable night when we listened to her song in Volokolamsk. Unfortunately my note did not reach Shulzhenko or possibly she had different plans. So till now I consider her to be a debtor to me!

After the end of the war being present at concerts of wartime songs, I always asked to sing a song Note. At one concert they asked me about the reason and I told them about that night episode with the gramophone record in Volokolamsk.

The territory we liberated (Istra, the Novoierusalimsky monastery - places near Moscow) looked very sad: a great number of dead German soldiers, broken German cars, ashes, big fires, smell of putrefaction, people wandering around, exhausted women meeting us in liberated settlements and

cities.

Our brigade was the first to rush into Volokolamsk. We saw terrible scenes of our infantrymen tearing off fingers of dead German soldiers together with their rings. It was very unpleasant, but it took place really. Near Volokolamsk I saw dead German soldiers bolted up in blocks as logs: terrible sight.

We left Volokolamsk and during 2 months tried to break further, to overcome the Volokolamsk firing line. But there were several hills we could not force. Infantrymen attacked in the very old manner and we had a task only to support them (we had no self-dependent tasks).

Therefore both infantrymen and our brigade suffered heavy losses during those frontal attacks. Till now I remember Gudina hill covered with dead infantrymen (not only ours, but also marines from Siberia).

After the end of the war veterans-marines recollected at the meetings that they were about 500, and only a few dozens survived. You see, in the beginning of the war we lost enormous number of soldiers because of lack of skill: we did not know how to fight.

After all, in March 1942 we managed to step forward. I also remember that in March there happened another joyful event: trucks equipped with shower-baths appeared in our brigade and we managed at last to take a bath, because we were full of lice (it was terrible!).

During the first 6 months of war all of us had lice. We tried to make fun of it, but that was no help. That shower was a real help. It was served by special sanitary detachment, which moved from one military unit to another.